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## ABSTRACT

This sequential teacher preparation program is designed to increase the effectiveness of the actual student teaching experience by increasing school-university cooperation and coordination through an organization called the the Cooperative Teacher Corps, and by offering a variety of practicum-based experiences prior to student teaching. Governed by a board of directors composed of five elected classroom teachers with the chairman of the department and the coordinator of student teaching as ex-officio board members, the Teacher Corps is open to any teacher interested in the student teaching process, although membership does not assure his participation as supervisor of student teachers. In addition to holding regular inservice conferences, the Corps takes an active role in developing and implementing the variety of practicum-based experiences which begin in the teacher candidate's sophomore year and culminate in student teaching. While enrolled in introductory educational courses, sophomores begin classroom laboratory experiences that range from observation to participation as aides. Following the sophomore year, students enroll in methods courses in which they work directly with teachers and children in designing and conducting teaching-learning situations. Preliminary evaluations of the program indicate increased student enthusiasm and confidence as a result of their experiences, better communication between school and university personnel, and improved feedback and supervisory practices. (JES)

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**Distinguished Achievement Awards**

**Entry**

**The American Association of Colleges for Teacher  
Education**

**PREPARING ELEMENTARY TEACHERS THROUGH  
PRACTICA AND THE COOPERATIVE TEACHER CORPS**

**Submitted by:**

**The College of Education  
Wichita State University**

**U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE  
OFFICE OF EDUCATION**

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## SUMMARY STATEMENT

Laboratory experiences for prospective teachers must be the basis on which a preparation program should be built. The key to these experiences in a classroom is the supervising teacher. At Wichita State University, a partnership in teacher education has evolved with the Cooperative Teacher Corps (CTC) and the Department of Elementary Education.

The focal point of this partnership is the cooperation, coordination, and communication established between the University faculty and student teacher supervisors. The Corps is a catalyst for the preparation program at the University. Supervisors of student teachers are basically selected from the Corps. Programs are provided by the Corps to upgrade the supervisory skills of members. Thus, newer concepts are directed immediately to student teachers and classroom situations.

The culminating experience for students in elementary education is a full semester of student teaching. However, the strongest of student teaching experiences is not adequate to fully develop a competent teacher. Rather, student teaching must be the capstone to a sound practicum-based total program.

While enrolled in introduction to teaching and educational psychology courses in the sophomore year, the students begin laboratory experiences in classrooms that vary from observation to participation as aides. The goal is to provide a

practical knowledge base.

Following the sophomore year, students enroll in methods courses in which they work directly with teachers and children in designing and conducting teaching-learning situations. For example, in the science methods courses students teach mini-lessons and develop units which are taught later in the term in the schools. A different practicum is provided in the Reading Clinic for students in the reading methods course. These students tutor children for ten weeks each semester.

This program contributes to teacher education through its use as a model to illustrate the combining of a variety of practicum-based experiences with a unique organization--The Cooperative Teacher Corps. This Corps functions as a regenerative agency in that ideas developed therein result in improved supervisory processes.

## PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

Few people will challenge the declaration that laboratory experiences for prospective elementary school teachers must be the basis on which all segments of the teacher education program should be built. The key to these experiences in a public school classroom is the supervising teacher. The Department of Elementary Education at Wichita State University has combined unique organization with creative involvement of public school staff in its program of educating elementary teachers.

Certainly the capstone of any teacher education program is the student teaching semester. In order to enhance this experience at Wichita State University, a Cooperative Teacher Corps was organized. The central theme of this organization is and has always been cooperation, coordination, and communication. This is, in essence, a real and a meaningful partnership in teacher education. As stated in the constitution of the Cooperative Teacher Corps, the purposes of the organization are: (1) to promote high standards for teacher education and student teaching in particular, (2) to promote more effective cooperation between the public school supervising teachers and the staff of the Department of Elementary Education at Wichita State University, and (3) to provide in-service activities which would make the work of the public school supervisor more effective in her role in the preparation of elementary teachers.

Members of the Department in cooperation with interested

teachers from the public schools provided the initial impetus for forming the Cooperative Teacher Corps organization which now includes over one hundred ten members. This Corps is governed by a Board of Directors composed of five elected classroom teachers with the Chairman of the Department and the Coordinator of Student Teaching as ex-officio board members. It is important to note that the balance of power on this board is held in the hands of the elected teachers.

Any teacher interested in the student teaching process is eligible for membership in the organization, but this membership does not assure his participation as a supervisor of student teachers. Two in-service programs for the Corps are developed each semester through the cooperation of the university staff and the teacher members. Nationally known resource persons in elementary education meet with the Corps for one of these programs. For example, programs have been presented by Dr. Lawrence Carrillo of San Francisco State College and Dr. William Bennie of the University of Texas. Members of the staff in elementary education are utilized for the other program each semester. These meetings have resulted in increased communication among university and public school personnel in considering the important issues of elementary education.

The supervising teachers who supervise students preparing to teach in elementary schools are basically selected from the membership of the Cooperative Teacher Corps. They have



indicated their professional interest and desire to update their supervisory skills by joining and supporting the organization. The Corps acts as a catalyst for the program of preparation for each student in elementary education and results in a smooth transition from the university to the very important student teaching experience. The student teachers begin this experience with the opening of the public school semester and follow the public school schedule rather than the university schedule. It must be recognized that the student teaching period is a vital segment of any program, but there must be a viable and meaningful set of experiences preceding the student teaching period.

The first direct experience in the elementary education sequence comes at the sophomore level in an introductory course in professional education. This course is unique in the combination of its focus, educational structure, cooperation with the public schools, and the experiences it provides for students. In this team-taught course, each student explores genuine issues in the current educational scene, is helped to understand himself as a teacher in our racially disturbed society, and, by means of television, has the opportunity to actually teach lessons which are evaluated by a committee of his peers. Within the large-small group organization, a variety of teaching-learning experiences are provided. Perhaps, the single most important aspect is the opportunity for each student to gain practical experience as

a classroom aide in a public school. Extensive contact with elementary school children is continued as a part of classes in educational psychology. The emphasis in this course is upon the observation of behavior of children in classroom situations.

Following the sophomore year the student is enrolled in the five elementary education methods courses and the special service courses in the areas of art, music, physical education, mathematics, and children's literature. In the methods courses students have direct contact with elementary school children in a variety of situations to illustrate the relationship between theoretical bases of learning and practical application. While none of these courses approach the practicum experience in the same manner or design, the science methods course is a good example of the types of experiences that are emphasized in the program for elementary teacher preparation. After studying about the three most common new science programs: ESS, SCIS, and Science, A Process Approach, students have opportunities to work with these materials in actual classrooms. The discovery approach is stressed.

Early in the semester each student is assigned a public school classroom at a grade level of his choice where he observes at least ten hours and administers the Piaget instrument to determine each child's developmental level. Immediately, planning begins with the classroom teacher for four weeks of science experiences, using one of the new science programs



approach. At the same time, the college student plans and teaches lessons before his peers. Video tapes are made, reviewed, and evaluated in preparation for his classroom teaching experiences. During this four weeks of teaching science, individual planning conferences are held each week with the college instructor. Every effort is made to individualize the instruction for each college student, just as he is encouraged to individualize his instruction for the elementary learner. Growth charts, in relation to behavioral objectives, are kept for both sets of learners. The social studies, the language arts, and the math methods courses involve varying forms of practicum experiences.

The reading methods course involves each student with a single child. Over a period of ten weeks elementary children are tutored by students enrolled in the methods course under the supervision of university personnel. During these practicum sessions the undergraduate applies his knowledge of informal evaluation, establishes an appropriate instructional level for the pupil, and initiates a corrective program. Materials suitable for reinforcing the reading skills exhibited as deficient are selected from the comprehensive selection of reading resources that are available in the reading clinic. Frequent instructor-student conferences are held to evaluate the child's progress and to give support and clarification to the trainee. The problems arising from the tutorial sessions are discussed in class sessions and the implications of these factors are

related to the elementary classroom situation. Materials available to the student are discussed and evaluated in terms of their functional value in the elementary classroom.

The major contribution of this preparation program to teacher education is its use as a model to illustrate the combining of a variety of practicum-based experiences with a unique organization of university and public school personnel--the Cooperative Teacher Corps. Indeed the Cooperative Teacher Corps functions as a regenerative agency in that ideas developed therein result in improved supervisory processes.

Except for the Cooperative Teacher Corps, no significant budgetary increases have been necessitated to support this practicum-based teacher preparation program. Activities of the Corps are supported by nominal dues paid by the members.

Although tentative at this point, our evaluators indicate increased student enthusiasm and confidence as a result of their expanded experiences and better communication and increased cooperation between the University faculty and public school teachers. The improved feed-back and supervisory practices are thought to be the result of the Cooperative Teacher Corps and the many practicum activities.